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CHAPTER III.

"GRACE ABOUNDING."

THE women in Bedford, to whom Bunyan had opened his mind, had been naturally interested in him. Young and rough as he was, he could not have failed to impress anyone who conversed with him with a sense that he was a remarkable person. They mentioned him to Mr. Gifford, the minister of the Baptist Church at Bedford. John Gifford had, at the beginning of the Civil War, been a loose young officer in the king's army. He had been taken prisoner when engaged in some exploit which was contrary to the usages of war. A court-martial had sentenced him to death, and he was to have been shot in a few hours, when he broke out of his prison with his sister's help, and, after various adventures, settled at Bedford as a doctor. The near escape had not sobered him. He led a disorderly life, drinking and gambling, till the loss of a large sum of money startled him into seriousness. In the language of the time, he became convinced of sin, and joined the Baptists, the most thorough-going and consistent of all the Protestant sects. If the Sacrament of Baptism is not a magical form, but is a personal act, in which the baptised person devotes himself to Christ's service, to baptise children at an age when they cannot understand what they are doing may well seem irrational and even impious.